

Message Text

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15

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2099

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CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 0250

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PINS, LA

SUBJ: CURRENT PATHET LAO TACTICS

1. IN RECENT WEEKS THE PATHET LAO APPEAR TO HAVE WORKED OUT A TYPE OF POWER PLAY WHICH MAY WELL BE THEIR MOST EFFECTIVE TACTIC TO DATE IN THE POLITICAL STRUGGLE WHICH, SINCE THE CEASE-FIRE, HAS REPLACED THE MILITARY ONE IN LAOS. CERTAINLY IT IS ONE WHICH THE VIENTIANE SIDE AND FAR FIND VERY HARD TO COUNTER. THIS TACTIC WAS FIRST SEEN IN BAN HOU EI SAI; A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT VERSION IS NOW BEING EMPLOYED AT THAKHEK; AND PREPARATIONS ARE UNDERWAY FOR IT TO BE REPEATED IN OTHER MAJOR CENTERS. THE SCENARIO IS SIMPLE. A GROUP OF STUDENTS OR WORKERS LAUNCH A SMALL DEMONSTRATION AGAINST CORRUPTION, FOREIGN (THAI) EXPLOITATION, HIGH PRICES OR SOME OTHER GENUINE GRIEVANCE. THE INITIAL ACTION RECEIVES SIGNIFICANT POPULAR SUPPORT, ALTHOUGH THE MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION STAYS NEUTRAL. THE VIENTIANE SIDE TAKES STEPS TO CONTROL THE DEMONSTRATORS WHO DEMAND TO NEGOTIATE WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE PGNU, INCLUDING

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TIATE WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE PGNU, INCLUDING

PATHET LAO MEMBERS. DEMONSTRATIONS ARE INITIATED IN SUPPORT OF THE DEMANDS. EITHER THEY SUCCEED OR, IF PUT DOWN TO BRUTALLY, CREATE "MARTYRS" AND NEW GRIEVANCES. IT CAN BE ANTICIPATED THAT THE LAST MOVE WILL BE A CALL FOR INTERVENTION BY THE "MIXED POLICE" (VIENTIANE SIDE AND PATHET LAO), COMBINED WITH APPEALS (SUCH AS HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE IN BAN HOU EI SAI AND THAKHEK) FOR THE QTE NEUTRALIZATION UNQTE OF THE TOWN OR PROVINCE INVOLVED. IT IS ALL VERY NEAT, VERY TIDY AND VERY HARD TO THWART. THE SINGIFICANT POINT IS THAT THIS TACTIC OVERTLY INTRODUCES PATHET LAO INFLUENCE INTO THE VIENTIANE-SIDE ZONE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

2. FROM OUR TALKS WITH LEADERS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE IN RECENT DAYS, AND PARTICULARLY WITH DEFMIN SISOUK AND FINANCE MINISTER NGON, IT IS CLEAR THAT THEY UNDERSTAND THESE SALAMI TACTICS VERY WELL BUT ARE AT A LOSS AS TO HOW TO COPE WITH THEM. IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE BAN HOU EI SAI AFFAIR, THE VIENTIANE SIDE -- AND PARTICULARLY SISOUK AND THE FAR -- HAVE SHOWN A DETERMINATION TO TAKE PROMPT, VIGOROUS ACTION AT THE LOCAL OR MILITARY REGION LEVEL, PREFERABLY BEFORE THE DISPUTE CAN RECEIVE CABINET ATTENTION AND GET LPF MINISTERS INTO THE ACT. THE JANUARY 9 INCIDENT ON ROUTE 13, TWENTY-TWO KILOMETERS FROM TAHKHEK, IN WHICH A CIVILIAN WAS KILLED AND NINE WOUNDED, MAY HAVE BEEN A REFLECTION OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE'S TOUGH LINE.

3. FOR MONTHS WE HAVE BEEN ENJOINING THE LEADERS OF THE VIENTIANE SIDE TO RUSTICATE INCOMPETENT AND VENAL CIVILIAN AND MILITARY OFFICIALS, BUT THE WEB OF FAMILY AND CLAN RELATIONSHIPS AND THE LAO/BUDDHIST RELUCTANCE TO HURT ANYONE'S FEELINGS HAVE EFFECTIVELY THWARTED SUCH REFORMS. THE LEADERSHIP NOW SEES THE HANDWRITING ON THE WALL BUT REMAINS INCAPABLE OF TAKING THE NECESSARY ACTIONS. THEIR ATTITUDE IS EXEMPLIFIED BY REMARKS MADE TO THE AMBASSADOR BY THE SECSTATE OF THE FOREIGN MINISTRY (VIENTIANE SIDE) LAST WEEK WHO COMMENTED THAT A MAJOR HOUSE-CLEANING MUST BE UNDERTAKEN AT ONCE BUT THAT EACH TRANSFER OR RETIREMENT WOULD, OF COURSE, HAVE

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TO BE HANDLED IN A MANNER THAT DID NOT REFLECT ON THE CHARACTER OF THE INDIVIDUAL AND WOULD PROTECT HIS DIGNITY AND THE GOOD NAME OF HIS FAMILY. IT IS AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THIS WIDELY-HELD SENSE OF VALUES THAT WE DESPAIR OF EFFECTIVE MEASURES TO REFORM AND TO MAKE MORE EFFICIENT THE VIENTIANE SIDE.

4. THE PROBABILITY OF INCREASING ACTIVITY ALONG THE

LINES MENTIONED ABOVE WAS HEIGHTENED BY THE ELECTION
ON JANUARY 11 OF NEW LEADERS OF THE LAO STUDENT FEDERATION (BEING REPORTED SEPTTEL) IN WHICH THE RADICALS
SWEPT THE BOARDS. THIS PERPETUATION OF RADICAL STUDENT
LEADERSHIP DOES NOT AUGUR WELL FOR THE FUTURE.

5. ONE OF THE FEATURES OF THE PRESENT SITUATION AND
OF PATHET LAO TACTICS THAT MAKE THEM SO EXQUISITELY
DIFFICULT TO MANAGE IS THAT THE PATHET LAO CAN CLAIM
WITH A CERTAIN SMALL DEGREE OF TRUTH THAT THEY BEAR
NO RESPONSIBILITY FOR DISTURBANCES OR DEMONSTRATIONS
IN THE TOWNS BUT THAT THEY ARE PREPARED TO BE HELPFUL
IN RESTORING TRANQUILITY AND ORDER.
WHITEHOUSE

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